United Nations S/2015/124

Security Council

Distr.: General
19 February 2015

Original: English

Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014)

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. This twelfth report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), paragraph 10 of Security Council resolution 2165 (2014) and paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 2191 (2014), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to report, every 30 days, on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. The information contained in the report is based on the data available to United Nations actors on the ground and reports from open sources and from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. Data from United Nations agencies on their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the period 1 to 31 January in line with their monthly reporting cycle, to allow for verification of data. More recent data have been included, when available, including on cross-border operations and deliveries to besieged communities.

II. Major developments

A. Political/military

3. Widespread conflict and high levels of violence continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period, particularly in the governorates of Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Deir ez-Zor, Rif Dimashq, Damascus, Al-Hasakeh, Idlib, Dar'a, Quneitra and Raqqa. Indiscriminate aerial bombings, including the use of barrel bombs, by Government forces and indiscriminate shelling by armed opposition, extremist and listed terrorist groups,[1] resulted in deaths, injuries and displacement of civilians. The use of improvised explosive devices and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices continued. The conduct of hostilities by all

[1] On 30 May 2013, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusra Front were designated as terrorist groups by the Security Council under resolution 1267 (1999). The two groups operate in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Please recycle

parties continues to be characterized by widespread disregard for the rules of international humanitarian law and for the protection of civilians.

4. There was a significant escalation of violence and attacks by Government forces in Damascus and Rif Dimashq. Attacks intensified in several towns of eastern Ghouta, particularly Douma, Saqba, Hamouria and Erbin, in addition to Jobar district in Damascus. Government forces conducted aerial bombardments, including with barrel bombs, shelled the area with heavy artillery and launched surface-to-surface missiles. The attacks, including on markets, resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties, including women and children. The armed opposition group, Jaish al-Islam, launched two consecutive attacks against the capital with mortars and rockets, hitting civilian areas and causing dozens of deaths and injuries, including among civilians, and damage to residential homes and public infrastructure. Clashes continued on the outskirts of Damascus between armed opposition groups and Government forces in and around the opposition-controlled Qaboun neighbourhood. Fighting also took place in the Zabadani area of Rif Dimashq, where local sources reported aerial attacks by Government forces, including with barrel bombs, after armed opposition groups took control of key checkpoints.

5. Shelling and aerial bombardment, including with barrel bombs, by pro-government forces and mortar, rocket and gas canister attacks by armed opposition groups continued in Aleppo. According to information received by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), at least 92 civilians, including 7 women and 26 children, were killed and dozens injured in opposition-controlled areas of Aleppo in January. For example, some 14 civilians were killed following airstrikes carried out by Syrian forces on the Al-Bab area of Aleppo governorate on 29 January. Local sources informed OHCHR that at least 51 civilians, including women and children, were killed in attacks by armed opposition groups against Government-controlled areas in Aleppo governorate, with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) being responsible for most of those civilian deaths.

6. Government forces carried out shelling and aerial bombardment, including with barrel bombs, on opposition-controlled areas in other governorates. For example, at least 91 civilians, including 18 children and 8 women, were killed in Dar'a while some 60 civilians, including women and children, were killed in Homs. In Deir ez-Zor, Government forces carried out aerial bombardments of areas held by ISIL and engaged in ground clashes in civilian areas. Some 71 civilians, including 10 women and 6 children, were reportedly killed in the violence. Four mass graves were found in Deir ez-Zor in December, containing the bodies of some of the hundreds of people abducted by ISIL in August 2014.

7. In Al-Hasakeh governorate, fighting between the Kurdish People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel) (YPG) and National Defence Forces erupted in Al-Hasakeh city on 17 January, killing and injuring civilians and closing markets and universities. Government forces carried out shelling and aerial bombardment against areas under ISIL and YPG control. On 20 January, at least 52 civilians were killed and nearly 200 others injured as a result of a Government air strike on a market in the village of Al-Khansaa, on the outskirts of the town of Tal Hamis, south-east of Qamishli.

8. During the reporting period, 14 attacks with improvised explosive devices and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices were reported, mainly in Homs,

Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Al-Hasakeh and Dar'a governorates. For example, in the Akrama district of Homs governorate, an explosion caused by vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, on 21 January, killed seven people and injured another 30. Elsewhere, on 1 February, in Damascus, near Al-Hamidya district, an attack with improvised explosive devices targeted a bus carrying Lebanese Shiite pilgrims, killing seven and injuring 22, with the Nusra Front claiming responsibility.

9. Parties to the conflict continued to attack civilian infrastructure and cut basic services, including electricity and water. For example, on 18 January, the Nusra Front and affiliated armed opposition groups cut the water supply to Idlib city. On 23 January, armed opposition groups in Kafr Najd targeted the electricity cables supplying Idlib city. Some 600,000 people were affected by the cuts. Electricity was restored on 6 February.

10. Since the end of December, an influx of some 9,000 people has been reported from several towns in the Ghouta area to collective shelters in Rif Dimashq. United Nations agencies and partners are providing relief assistance to evacuees in collective shelters. Following an assessment mission, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) highlighted the protection issues reported by the evacuees, which included the recruitment of males by non-state armed groups in the area; the forced recruitment of minors; the separation of families owing to reported screening of evacuated males; an unsafe evacuation route owing to the presence of snipers; and the loss of personal documentation and identity documents, as well as the confiscation of identity documents by non-state armed groups at checkpoints.

11. Violence continued to displace civilians. For example, fighting in Al-Hasakeh displaced some 15,000 people temporarily from Al-Hasakeh city to Qamishli city, as well as to rural areas outside of the cities. Some 26,000 people were estimated to be displaced in Dar'a governorate following the intensification in violence from 8 February. Approximately 1,250 people moved from the eastern to the western part of Aleppo city and around 10,000 internally displaced persons moved again within the western part of Aleppo city. In the first week of January, heavy fighting between ISIL and Government forces near Deir ez-Zor airport displaced about 5,000 people, mostly women and children, from western rural Deir ez-Zor villages, including Ayash, Hawaij Thyab Jazeera and Al-Kharita.

12. During the reporting period, the international coalition conducted almost daily air strikes against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The majority are in and around the town of Ayn al-Arab/Kobani in northern Aleppo governorate. On 26 January, the Kurdish People's Protection Units, which had been assisted by armed opposition fighters and Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga, declared that the town had been fully recaptured. Some 1,500 to 2,000 people have reportedly returned to the city.

13. Following circulation by ISIL of a video of the group burning to death Jordanian pilot Mo'az al-Kassasbeh on 3 February, dozens of Jordanian fighter jets reportedly struck ISIL training centres and weapons storage sites, on 5 and 6 February.

14. In his briefing to the Security Council on 17 February, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria indicated that, following prolonged negotiations held in the preceding months on the freeze proposal, and his request that the

Government of the Syrian Arab Republic assist the United Nations in implementing a pilot project in a specific district in Aleppo, the Government was willing to suspend for six weeks all aerial attacks and artillery shelling throughout the city of Aleppo. On the basis of that development, the Special Envoy will travel to Damascus and separately send a delegation to Aleppo, no later than the last week of February, to assess the conditions for a freeze and the space for accelerated and unhindered delivery of aid in the contested district of Salah ad-Din, following which he expects to be able to announce when the beginning of the six weeks will come into effect. The assessment by the Office of the Special Envoy would have to account for accelerated developments on the ground in the light of reports on 17 February of an accelerated offensive by Government forces in the northern part of Aleppo near a major supply road. The Special Envoy will further actively engage the opposition to elicit their support for United Nations efforts in order to minimize the cost to civilians and for them, too, to do their part in avoiding any use of heavy weapons.

15. Efforts continued during the reporting period to find a sustainable political solution to the Syrian conflict. Meetings were held between opposition groups in Cairo, on 23 and 24 January, and between select members of the opposition and the Government, in Moscow, from 26 to 29 January. Outcome documents from both meetings called for the achievement of a political solution to the conflict based on the Geneva communiqué, as well as maintaining Syrian unity and territorial integrity and combating terrorism.

B. Human rights

16. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continued to receive allegations and to document cases of arbitrary arrests, detention, torture and death in custody inside Government detention centres. These cases included a report that a detainee previously held at Aleppo central prison and subsequently transferred to a security branch died in detention, reportedly under torture. Allegations were also received of death in custody as a result of torture in Sidnaya military prison and Teshrin military hospital prison. Specifically, on 27 January, an orthopaedic doctor from Douma, eastern Ghouta, who had been in detention for over two years, reportedly died in Sidnaya prison, in Rif Dimashq. The doctor was detained by the Air Force Intelligence security branch in August 2012 on the grounds that he treated patients in a field hospital in Douma. Local human rights defenders informed OHCHR that the doctor may have died as a result of torture. OHCHR has not verified the allegations but it has documented other cases of torture, ill-treatment and inhumane conditions in Sidnaya prison.

17. Military security and air intelligence continued to carry out arbitrary detentions of individuals suspected of collaborating with the opposition. In January, at least 18 civilians, including media personnel, doctors and human rights defenders were detained by security branches in Dar'a. In the city of Homs and the district of Al-Houla at least 11 civilians were detained by Military Security and National Defence Forces on 20 January, following an operation by Government security forces.

18. Government forces detained two local journalists, on 9 and 13 January, at their residence in the city of Hama and took them to undisclosed locations. The two journalists remain missing.

19. Armed opposition groups, particularly ISIL and the Nusra Front, continued to perpetrate violations of international humanitarian law as well as human rights abuses in areas where they exercise control. They carried out attacks against civilians, executions, abductions and imposed restrictions on the fundamental freedoms of civilians. ISIL reportedly executed some two dozen people on the grounds of apostasy, spying for the Government, or fighting for the Government or the Nusra Front, and also executed one person for posting a photograph of an ISIL militant on social media. Videos were posted on the Internet of the Nusra Front executing two women for alleged adultery.

20. Local sources report that the Nusra Front is increasingly kidnapping and detaining human rights defenders and journalists who are critical of the group. For example, two journalists were abducted by the Nusra Front from Idlib on 7 January and released on 31 January. Another local media activist, held since December 2014, was reportedly executed by the Nusra Front on 26 January in Aleppo. According to information collected by OHCHR, during the reporting period at least four media centres in Idlib were raided by the Nusra Front.

21. On 8 January, the shrine of Sunni Imam al-Nawawi in the city of Nawa, Dar'a, was destroyed. Local human rights defenders accused the Nusra Front of planting the explosives and informed OHCHR that Nusra Front commanders had in the past expressed disdain for Imam al-Nawawi and his shrine. OHCHR is not in a position to verify the allegations.

22. On 2 February, the Syrian authorities issued a note verbale indicating that 384 people were "pardoned" after signing written pledges not to carry weapons or participate in "disturbances" or activities affecting the "security and stability" of the Syrian Arab Republic. OHCHR is not aware of the fate of those "pardoned" and is not in a position to verify the information received.

C. Humanitarian access

23. Some 12.2 million people require humanitarian assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic. Around 7.6 million people are internally displaced and more than 3.8 million Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries and North Africa.

24. The delivery of humanitarian assistance in the country remains extremely difficult as a result of violence and insecurity, shifting conflict lines, deliberate interference with and closing of operations, obstructive administrative procedures and financial shortfalls. The situation in hard-to-reach areas, especially those besieged by Government or armed opposition forces, continued to be of grave concern. In addition, a winter storm compounded the humanitarian plight of people and hampered access in parts of the country as many roads became inaccessible for several days.

25. Three separate requests for inter-agency convoys were submitted during the reporting period to reach four locations in Rif Dimashq governorate and two in Homs governorate. One inter-agency cross line convoy was able to proceed to Al-Wa'er, Homs, with multisectoral assistance for 75,000 people. Despite the support of local authorities, the majority of medical supplies, including all surgical items, as well as diarrhoea kits, midwifery kits and reproductive health kits, were removed by Government security personnel during the loading process.

26. The Government did not respond to the request to reach four locations in Rif Dimashq (Zabadani, Madaya, Douma and east Harasta) to cover the urgent needs of 20,000 people. One inter-agency convoy for providing assistance to 60,000 people in Talbiseh and Msrifah, in Homs, requested in December and scheduled for 3 February, was verbally approved by the Governor. However written approval and facilitation letters were not provided.

27. As of 9 February, the United Nations and its partners have sent 66 shipments, 47 from Turkey and 19 from Jordan, to the Syrian Arab Republic under the terms of Security Council resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). The shipments included food assistance for over 812,000 people; non-food items for around 860,000 people; water and sanitation supplies for over 316,000 people; and medical supplies for 468,000 people. Many of the medical supplies shipped were reusable and will benefit more patients in the next few months. Other assistance (including school supplies) was delivered to some 9,900 people. In line with resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), the United Nations notified the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in advance of each shipment, including details of content, destination district and number of beneficiaries, confirming the humanitarian nature of the shipment.

28. The United Nations monitoring mechanism continued its activities in Turkey and Jordan. A security incident near the border resulted in the closure of Bab al-Hawa crossing from 26 to 31 January. The mechanism's operations in Iraq remain pending owing to continued insecurity. The mechanism continued to benefit from excellent cooperation and support from the Governments of Turkey and Jordan.

29. United Nations agencies continued to use the Nusaybin/Qamishli crossing, with the consent of the Governments of Turkey and the Syrian Arab Republic. The World Food Programme (WFP) shipped all of its planned 46,000 food rations through the Nusaybin border point. However, delays in the receipt of facilitation letters from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic delayed distribution between 14 and 27 January. Food dispatches commenced on 28 January upon receipt of the facilitation letters.

30. Parties to the conflict continued to block supplies to territory outside their control. For example, reports were received that ISIL blocked the delivery of fuel to areas controlled by the Government and by YPG/Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Al-Hasakeh governorate after Government forces prevented flour and food from reaching ISIL-controlled areas in southern Al-Hasakeh. Separately, local authorities in Idlib restricted the delivery of assistance to opposition-held areas after water and electricity were cut to Idlib city by non-state armed groups. Exceptional approval was, however, given to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to deliver water supplies to people left without access to water.

31. Ongoing insecurity and access restrictions prevented food deliveries to the north-eastern governorates of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. As a result, once again, none of the planned food rations, consisting of provisions for 600,000 civilians in those governorates, could be delivered in February. While some humanitarian operations have been maintained, ISIL continued to restrict humanitarian access in areas it controlled, closing down a number of humanitarian offices in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor governorates and telling others to suspend their operations. For example, in Raqqa, ISIL informed WFP partners in January, including the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, to suspend humanitarian activities in the governorate. This, combined with mounting

insecurity, has resulted in a complete halt in WFP food deliveries to areas under ISIL control. Due to an escalation in the conflict, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had to suspend its operations in the Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor governorates. FAO has been closely monitoring the situation in Deir ez-Zor and has since been able to partly resume operations. Photographs released on social media in early February appeared to show WFP food boxes, bearing ISIL labels, being distributed in Deir Hafr, eastern Aleppo governorate. WFP is trying to verify the authenticity of the photographs, where they were taken and the circumstances surrounding the incident. WFP last reached the area in August 2014. WFP condemned the "manipulation of desperately needed food aid inside Syria" and called on all parties to the conflict to respect humanitarian principles.

32. Despite the extremely challenging operating environment, United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners continued to reach millions of people in need in the month of January. WFP dispatched food for over 3.4 million people across 12 governorates. The World Health Organization (WHO) distributed medicines and supplies for 344,161 treatments in three governorates. UNICEF reached 608,526 people with a range of support, including water and sanitation, nutrition, winter clothes for children, education and child protection services. In addition, chlorine deliveries allowed some 15.6 million people to access safe water (with the exception of people in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor). UNHCR reached 342,371 people with core relief items, in addition to protection services. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reached 205,657 people with multisectoral assistance. Some 137,958 people received agricultural support from FAO. Interventions by the United Nations Population Fund supported 34,200 people.

33. Non-governmental organizations continued to deliver urgent food, health, sanitation and other assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic, reaching some 1.2 million people in January, including through the provision of ongoing services. This included aid to over 565,000 people in Aleppo, 221,000 people in Idlib, nearly 145,000 people in Dar'a, and nearly 87,000 people in Deir ez-Zor governorates. Non-governmental organizations continued to experience challenges as regards passing checkpoints and providing assistance to people in need in Raqqa.

Besieged areas

34. Of the 4.8 million people in hard-to-reach areas, some 212,000 people remain besieged in the Syrian Arab Republic, with 185,500 people besieged by Government forces in eastern Ghouta, Darayya and Yarmouk, and 26,500 people besieged by non-state armed groups in Nubul and Zahraa.

35. In January, two besieged communities in Douma and Yarmouk were reached, with food distributed to 304 people (0.1 per cent of the 212,000 people in besieged areas), non-food items distributed to 200 people (0.1 per cent), and medical assistance distributed to 1,000 people (0.5 per cent), as well as polio vaccines.

36. In eastern Ghouta (specifically in Douma, Harasta, Erbin, Zamalka, Saqba, Kafr Batna, Ain Tarma and Hammura), some 163,500 people remain besieged. Approximately 9,000 people have left several locations in eastern Ghouta, some of whom are from besieged locations. As noted in the previous report (S/2015/48), on 1 January, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered 30,000 polio vaccinations and insulin for 1,000 patients to Douma. Other medication, including injectable medicines and surgical supplies for 17,950 treatments, were denied.

37. In Darayya (Rif Dimashq), about 4,000 people remain besieged. No assistance reached Darayya during the reporting period. People in the area were last assisted in October 2012.

38. In Yarmouk, about 18,000 people remain besieged. There was an escalation in armed conflict, including frequent exchanges of fire and the use of heavy weapons during the reporting period, which disrupted the distribution of assistance. Insecurity at the distribution point limited access by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to two days in the month of January. Some 200 people received non-food items and 304 people received food assistance. No medical assistance was delivered in January. UNRWA was able to transport 67 students to sit school exams.

39. In Nubul and Zahraa, about 26,500 people are besieged by opposition forces. No humanitarian assistance has reached the two villages since 8 May 2014.

Free passage of medical supplies, personnel and equipment

40. During the reporting period, WHO and its implementing partners dispatched medicines and medical supplies for 344,161 people in three governorates. This included deliveries across conflict lines to Aleppo and Rif Dimashq for some 232,661 people.

41. A subnational polio campaign was carried out between 4 and 8 January, with the aim of vaccinating 308,191 children under the age of 5. Some 178,097 children under the age of 5 were vaccinated against polio, measles, rubella, pertussis and hepatitis, including 15,997 children who were vaccinated for the first time. Insecurity and displacement resulted in fewer children being reached in the districts of Deir ez-Zor and Rif Dimashq that were targeted as part of the campaign, while Quneitra was not covered, owing to active conflict.

42. Access to medical supplies and equipment continued to be restricted by insecurity and constraints imposed on humanitarian operations by parties to the conflict. For example, despite Ministry of Foreign Affairs approval for the delivery of medical supplies for 96,408 people, a shipment of medical assistance from WHO to Douma and Madaya in Rif Dimashq remains pending, subject to further discussion with the Government. The delivery of injectable medicines and surgical supplies was denied. A separate request to deliver assistance across conflict lines to Qamishli has also gone unanswered.

43. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has approved a shipment of medical assistance to curb the Myiasis outbreak in Douma. The shipment is scheduled for February 2015.

44. Attacks on medical facilities, ambulances and medical personnel continued during the reporting period. In January, Physicians for Human Rights documented four attacks on medical facilities. Three were by Government forces and one by unknown forces. Two attacks occurred in Rif Dimashq and one each in Dar'a and Deir ez-Zor governorates. Three attacks were with missiles and one with an explosive device (by unknown forces). Physicians for Human Rights also documented the deaths of five medical personnel in January, one of them a targeted killing. Four of the personnel were killed by Government forces and one by unknown forces. Two were killed by shooting, two by shelling and bombing and one by torture. Three deaths occurred in Dar'a, one in Rif Dimashq and one in Homs.

Administrative procedures

45. There were no changes to administrative procedures at the central level during the reporting period. The movement of supplies for humanitarian assistance to hard-to-reach areas continued to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis centrally, including through meetings of the joint committee established following the adoption of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014). The committee includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs, security personnel, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the United Nations. Despite a verbal communication from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 7 September 2014 that governors in Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Idlib could authorize inter-agency cross-line convoys, requests continue to require approval at the central level. This has continued to lead to significant delays in the approval of some convoys.

46. In January, humanitarian organizations in Al-Hasakeh governorate were instructed to share a list of beneficiaries with the local authorities as a precondition for the issuance of a facilitation letter by the Governor. This request is extremely worrying and agencies are following up with relevant authorities.

47. As of 31 January, 38 requests from the United Nations for visas or visa renewals remained pending, 33 of which were within the 15-working-day limit and five of which were exceeding the 15-working-day limit. There are 15 pending visas for international non-governmental organizations.

48. During the reporting period, one additional national non-governmental organization was authorized by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to partner with agencies of the United Nations system. One national non-governmental organization, which has a number of partnerships with United Nations agencies, had its authorization revoked, without explanation. As of 31 January, there are 110 national non-governmental organizations working with United Nations agencies through 166 branches, throughout the Syrian Arab Republic.

Safety and security of staff and premises

49. Mortar and rocket attacks on Damascus by armed opposition groups led to heightened insecurity in Damascus, including for United Nations staff. Rocket and mortar strikes were reported in areas close to the hotels where United Nations staff reside and one staff member of IOM was injured on 25 January in an attack near Abassayin Square in Damascus.

50. On 4 February, one staff member of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent was killed and two were injured in shelling by armed opposition groups in Idlib.

51. On 5 February, one staff member of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent was killed by a mortar attack in Douma.

52. On 5 February, a mortar struck a hotel in Damascus where United Nations staff reside. No injuries were reported.

53. On 10 February, the death of an aid worker held by ISIL in the Syrian Arab Republic was confirmed.

54. A total of 32 United Nations staff members, 28 of whom are UNRWA staff, continue to be detained or are missing. The total number of humanitarian workers killed in the conflict since March 2011 is 72. This includes 17 staff members of the

United Nations, 42 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, seven staff members and volunteers of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and six staff members of international non-governmental organizations.

III. Observations

55. After nearly four years of fighting and one year on from the adoption of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), the situation for people in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to deteriorate. The parties to the conflict are failing to live up to their international legal obligations to protect civilians. Explosive weapons continue to be used in populated areas throughout the country, killing and injuring men, women and children and causing widespread damage. Hospitals and other protected facilities and infrastructure continue to be attacked. Some 212,000 people remain besieged.

56. The conflict has become business as usual. We need a commitment from the parties to the conflict to implement resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014). As a matter of urgency, progress must be achieved in five areas: (a) lifting the siege on 212,000 people; (b) ensuring access for the delivery of medical and surgical supplies to all parts of the country; (c) ending the practice of using the denial of key services as a weapon of war; (d) rebuilding the education system in the Syrian Arab Republic; and (e) addressing the relentless and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, including through the use of barrel bombs. We will continue to engage members of the Security Council and countries with influence over the parties to find solutions in the above-mentioned areas. The members of the humanitarian community need help from all in order to continue to carry out their work in the Syrian Arab Republic.

57. Humanitarian actors must be allowed to do their job without interference and the parties must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to affected people throughout the country. Every month, the United Nations and international and national non-governmental organizations deliver aid to millions of people in need. With further and sustained pressure from members of the Security Council and other Member States, the United Nations and its partners would be able to reach millions more. The humanitarian community must also be adequately resourced. I hope that representatives from key countries around the world will join me in Kuwait on 31 March to raise funds for the humanitarian response in the Syrian Arab Republic and the region.

58. There is no humanitarian or military solution to this conflict. It can only be solved through dialogue and an agreed political process. The recent meetings in Cairo and Moscow emphasized the need to find a political solution to the Syrian conflict based on the Geneva Communiqué. I welcome this re-engagement by international actors in search of a political solution, as well as the proposed follow-up to those meetings, and hope that they can serve as the start of a meaningful political process. In this spirit, my Special Envoy for Syria will continue to assess ways to renew diplomatic efforts towards a process based on the international consensus enshrined in the Geneva Communiqué. Defining a political solution will involve tough decisions and compromise, with everyone putting aside their preconditions for launching talks.